

## **Mandated Photo ID is Bad Legislation**

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S.N.A.P. (Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program), formerly known as “food stamps,” is a well-established federal food program that has enjoyed bipartisan support in Congress for many years. Low-income seniors have always been its most underserved group. The Food Research and Action Center estimates that only 1 in 3 eligible seniors receives SNAP; Rhode Island may be doing better thanks to an excellent outreach program. Surveys have revealed that many seniors don’t participate because they fear a stigma attached to SNAP. To address that concern, as well as to make SNAP more convenient, a few years ago the federal government replaced the old food stamp book with an EBT card similar to a debit card. Now it’s no longer obvious to everyone else when someone is using their SNAP benefit.

This year a legislator, ironically from a town with many low-income residents, introduced a bill to require shoppers to show a photo ID when using their SNAP card. Speaking before the House H.E.W. Committee, she said this was needed to reduce “widespread fraud,” a charge she could only back up with anecdotes from a couple of her constituents.

The Senior Agenda Coalition joined several groups in strong opposition. The Economic Progress Institute documented that federal SNAP regulations expressly prohibited treating its EBT card users differently than other shoppers using debit cards. For example, in the past some markets made food stamp users stand in long lines at a designated register. I added that this rule was specifically intended to reduce stigma and reach more underserved seniors. Undaunted by these facts, the sponsor continued to proclaim the need for this bill. It seemed to me that her real intent was to discredit or even eliminate SNAP, while proclaiming her concern for those who “really need it.” Fortunately, there was little support for that bill among committee members.

However, speaking of requiring photo IDs, in 2011 the General Assembly passed legislation requiring that by 2014, all voters must show a photo ID to vote. Its sponsors provided no

substantial evidence of voter fraud beyond a few anecdotes from people in the community. My understanding is that when there is voter fraud, it mostly occurs at the point of registration, not at the point of voting. This law offered a solution to a non-existent problem.

This legislation, unless repealed, has real potential to disenfranchise many Rhode Island seniors during this year's elections. Thirty-three percent of people age 75 or older no longer have driver's licenses, the only photo ID many of us typically carry. That's roughly 26,000 seniors. The legislation mandated the Secretary of State's office to issue, at no cost, photo IDs to persons who lacked them. However, despite well-publicized photo ID fairs at some senior buildings, we doubt that process will reach most seniors. . Legislation has been introduced this year to repeal this wrong-headed, unnecessary law. We urge our legislators to support this repeal.